

Utilizing the SPD Method to Enhance the Art of Public Speaking

Hiroko NAKAMURA

Abstract: This paper aims to gain insight on how to successfully connect with any audience through speech with the sole purpose of inspiring said audience. When it comes to connecting successfully with an audience, a mastery of the spoken word, forging a connection with the audience, and how it is strategically delivered, is necessary. This literature review examines three key points introduced by the author in attaining a successful connection with any audience using the SPD method. SPD stands for Simple Words, Pause, and Description. This paper uses a wide variety of data garnered from several inspiring and famous people and the speeches they delivered. It establishes that to attain a complete and successful connection with any audience, the level of words used in delivering a speech need not be highly convoluted. This paper suggests that the SPD method can also be classified as a minimalist concept that can be used largely in the field of public speaking, literature, and writing.

Key Words: Public speaking, Speech method, Presentation, Commencement speech, SPD Method, Inspiring speech, Minimalist Concept

Inspiring Audience through Public Speaking

Public speaking is a form of expression. It may be used for informing, entertaining, persuading or inspiring purposes. According to Malcolm Kushner, the author of *Public Speaking for Dummies*, “There are three types of speakers in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened” (Kushner, 2010). To avoid wondering what happened, a speaker should know the whys and wherefores of his speech. Below are the key questions every good speaker must consider when writing his speech:

- WHERE and WHEN will this speech be given? (Context)
- For WHOM is this speech intended?
- WHAT should be the content of the speech?
- HOW should it be delivered?
- WHY is this speech being given?

On the afternoon of November 19, 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln delivered his speech the Gettysburg Address in Pennsylvania during the unrelenting American Civil War. His speech remains to this day as one of the most outstanding speeches in history. The key reasons as to why the Gettysburg Address remains a best-known speech are due to these:

1. It is clear and concise
2. It is very short and Lincoln used words that everyone could understand
3. It is inspiring in the past and it still inspires today

In the book *Confessions of a Public Speaker*, Scott Berkun wrote, “History bears out that people with clear ideas and

strong points are the ones we remember” (Berkun, 2009). Clarity is a must for any form of communications (written or verbal) and being able to inspire is the end goal of every public speaker.

In 2019, Mr. Akio Toyoda, the President of Toyota Motor Corporation and an alumnus of Babson College, was invited to its Centennial commencement to give a speech (Babson College, 2019). His speech was equal parts captivating, humorous, and heartfelt. Despite Mr. Toyoda’s speech being less than 15 minutes in length, it was a success as it was clear, concise, and inspiring.

What makes a speech a good one? And how does one effectively hold an audience’s attention and inspire during delivery? To answer these questions, the author would like to introduce a new minimalist concept called the SPD Method.

The SPD Method

The SPD method can be categorized as a minimalist concept that came about after an intensive look into various famous speeches. These speeches capture the nature of the SPD method showcasing how an individual can become an effective and inspiring communicator.

The SPD Method stands for:

1. Simple words
2. Pause
3. Description

The KISS Principle

Simplicity is the state of being simple. Something, when said, is easy to understand is considered *simple* as opposed to something that is difficult to comprehend. In 1960, the U.S. Navy designed a principle called KISS, which is an acronym for “keep it simple, stupid”. The KISS principle, a term associated with aircraft engineer Kelly Johnson (Ben R. Rich, 1995) asserts that “most systems work best if they are kept simple rather than made complicated; therefore, simplicity should be a key goal in design, and unnecessary complexity should be avoided.” When the year 1970 came about, this phrase had risen in popularity and with it came a variety of different ways of saying it (Pit & Quarry, July 1970).

These days, the KISS principle is widespread among business professionals and those in the educational fields who utilize it for communication. Whether they are letter writers, memo writers, or bloggers – they realize that keeping written information simple makes for a better communication. Julia Hobsbawm, in her book titled “The Simplicity Principle” stated that “Today, complexity envelopes us like a tight scarf, even in everyday tasks. It is invisible and yet drains time, energy and focus. We can see and feel the effects of too little KISS and too much complexity all too clearly” (Hobsbawm, 2020).

The Importance of Simplicity

The concept of simplicity has been advocated for in history by philosophers and great minds alike. Enumerated below are examples of phrases with words that can be made simpler.

1. “Your pulchritude is irresistible.”

The word “pulchritude” means “beauty.” It would be easier to say: “Your beauty is irresistible.”

2. “She is known for her altruism.”

The word “altruism” means “kindness.” Simply put: “She is known for her kindness.”

3. “His wealth shows a marvel worthy aggrandizement.”

“Aggrandizement” means “growth” or “increase”, ergo, stating it as “His wealth shows a marvel worthy increase”

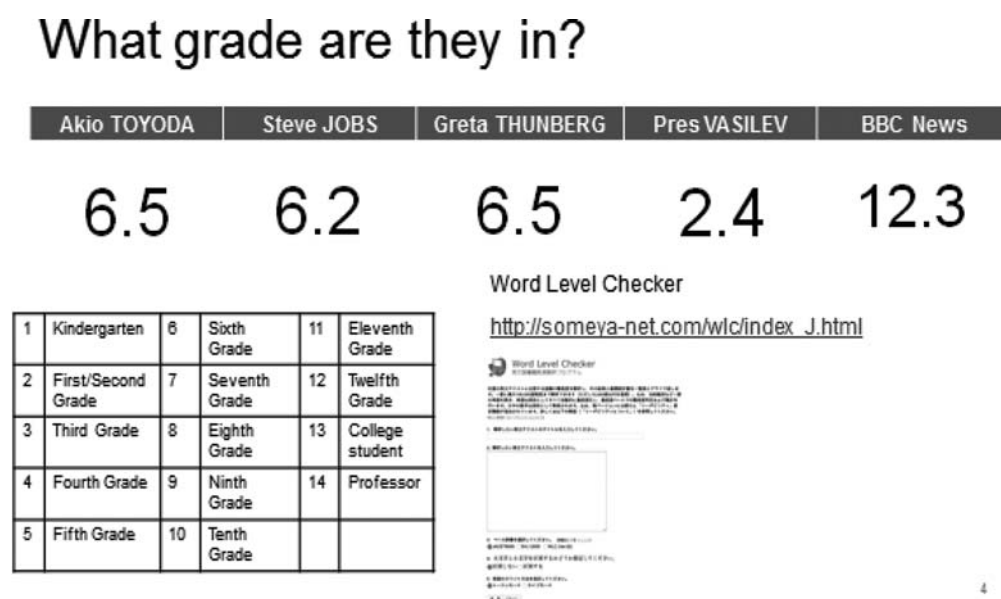
would come off better to readers.

Another key point to consider is to stick with shorter syllable words when giving a speech. The number of syllables in a word and the probability of losing an audience's attention are directly proportional to each other. An example of this is listed below. On the left of the table are five words with three to four syllables and on the right are words with one to two syllables. Both sides are synonymous with each other.

abomination (5 syllables)	curse; horror; disgrace; (1-2 syllables)
conviviality (6 syllables)	merry; festive (2 syllable)
cuddlesome (3 syllables)	cuddly (2 syllables)
exacerbate (4 syllables)	worsen; inflame (2 syllables)
perspicacious (4 syllables)	shrewd; wise (1 syllable)

The Word Level of Famous Speeches

Shown below is a table graph taken from a Word Level Checker analyser depicting different vocabulary levels with their associated grades.



On the table graph above, it can be seen that the BBC News has a 12.3 grade on average that translates into a 12th grade or college level score. Greta Thunberg is a Swedish environmental activist and gained fame through her famous speech “How Dare You” (Sugiura, E., 2019). Her word level is at 6.5 which are between 6th to 7th grade levels. Mr. Akio Toyoda with his “Find Your Own Donut!” speech levelled out at 6.5 as well. The word level grade for the former Chairman of Apple Inc., Steve Jobs, taken from his famous commencement speech at Stanford University (June 12, 2005) is at 6.2 making it a solid 6th grade level score. Lastly, Pres Vasilev, Champion of Toastmasters International 2013 (August 25, 2013) scored between 1st and 2nd word grade level with his inspiring “Changed by a Tire” speech.

Based on the results of these famous speakers, it can be seen that they all chose to use Simple Words in their speeches. Simple words engage and make it easier for an audience to follow along. Mark Twain says it best with his “Don’t use a five-dollar word when a 50 cent word will do”.

The Power of Pause

Terry Hershey in her book “The Power of Pause” succinctly described it as “doing less, and becoming more” (Hershey, 2011). “Pause” is a temporary stop in action or speech and can be a powerful tool in grabbing an audience’s attention. Pausing is beneficial for both parties involved – the one giving the speech and the one the speech is intended for. It allows the audience to digest what is being said and at the same time giving the public speaker a little time to rest or collect his thoughts. Pausing also gives the speaker the benefit of using less filler words like “um’s” and “ah’s” which can get quite annoying.

Mr. Toyoda did a superb job of establishing the power of the “Pause” in his “Find Your Own Donut” speech. Whenever Mr. Toyoda wanted to draw attention to a word or phrase in his speech, he would pause. A good example would be when he was highlighting how monotonous his social life was, he said “So when I attended Babson, I was, in a word (*pause*) boring”. To bring attention to how he saw himself all those years ago, he paused right before uttering the word “boring.” That strategic pause served its purpose of bringing to attention the word that succeeded it. By remembering to pause, one becomes more reflective, effective, and impactful in the way he communicates with an audience. The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause (Twain, 1923).



The Difficulty of Description for Metaphor

To cement the core message of his speech, Mr. Toyoda adopted a concrete familiar object in the shape and form of an American donut. In his speech, a donut signified the abstract concept of deriving happiness from an object or person. For a brief second, Mr. Toyoda had everyone mentally picturing a donut and “experiencing” how it made them happy. Furthermore, Mr. Toyoda specifically used “American donuts” not “sweets”, not “cakes”, but American donuts. Also, if he had been specific as to the brand of donuts (e.g. “Krispy Crème” or “Dunkin Donuts”), it can be inferred that he would have lost the attention of a certain percentage of his audience due to his analogy being not in congruence with those who didn’t necessarily like those brands of donuts. However, the fact that he used “American donuts” made it possible for every brand of donuts to co-exist. His brilliant approach successfully bridged an abstract concept to a concrete one.

The Importance of Familiarity

In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln's vivid word of description was "here." He used the word "here" eight times. A short excerpt from his speech shows how the word "here" is used in context: "The brave men, living and dead, who struggled *here*, have consecrated it...The world will little note, nor long remember what we say *here*, but it can never forget what they did *here*..." The adverb "here" acted as an anchor for his whole speech. It added weight to the purpose of dedicating "a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who *here* gave their lives..." in the American Civil War. By using the word "here" eight times, Lincoln highlighted the gravity of the current situation at that time and the foundation of undying hope that every American citizen can have in the future due to the sacrifice of those soldiers that perished. Fact is that many speeches are plain and boring. By using vivid and metaphorical words, a public speaker can create strong and memorable images within his target audience's minds.

Conclusion

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address is the SPD Method in motion. In his speech, Lincoln had exactly 10 sentences, 272 words and the whole speech lasted under 3 minutes. The Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is a popular case study of public speaking. As afore mentioned in the beginning of this paper, when giving a speech that is meant to inspire, one must take into consideration these pointers:

- WHERE and WHEN will this speech be given? (Context)
- For WHOM is this speech intended?
- WHAT should be the content of the speech?
- HOW should it be delivered?
- WHY is this speech being given?

When broken down, Abraham Lincoln gave his speech to his audience at a plot of land in a time of ongoing war (where and when in context). He dedicated that piece of land to the fallen soldiers (for whom). The content of his speech was meant to inspire his audience and to bring hope (what and how) and lastly, "he wanted to make sure that Americans chose the right path. And he did" (Why) (Zimmer, 2010). He answered all these key pointers under a span of 3 minutes and in 272 words utilizing simple words, pauses, and descriptions.

The use of simple words in speeches is vital in achieving the expected success of garnering any audience's attention. Avoiding highly convoluted words and those that have more than three syllables will aid in a finer delivery. Many exceptional speeches have had a number of strategically placed pauses scattered all throughout from beginning to end to drive home a point and to elicit a feeling of connection with an audience as was superbly displayed in Mr. Toyoda's speech. Lastly, the clear usage of concrete descriptive words to describe abstract concepts forges a connection between audience and orator. By studying the great speeches in history, one can learn a lot about public speaking. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Speech is power. Speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel." The SPD method is geared towards bringing about the best public speaking experience from beginning to end that will effectively inspire any audience.

References

- Babson College. (n.d.). Remarks by Akio Toyoda. Best College For Entrepreneurship | Babson College.
<https://www.babson.edu/about/news-events/babson-events/commencement/2019-ceremony-recap/graduate-ceremony/remarks-by-akio-toyoda/>
- Berkun, S. (2009). *Confessions of a public speaker*. O'Reilly Media.
- Clarence Leonard (Kelly) Johnson. (1995). *A Biographical Memoir by Ben R. Rich*, National Academies Press, Washington, DC, p.13.

- Craig, E. Ed. (1998) Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. London, Routledge. simplicity (in Scientific Theory) p.780-783.
- Hennessey, A. (2019). *Your guide to public speaking: Build your confidence, find your voice, and inspire your audience*. Adams Media.
- Hershey, T. (2011). *The power of pause: Becoming more by doing less*. Loyola Press.
- Hobsbawm, J. (2020). *The simplicity principle: Six steps towards clarity in a complex world*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Kushner, M. (2010). *Public speaking for dummies*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Pit & Quarry. (1970). "As in every other step of the development process, follow the KISS principle-Keep It Simple, Stupid.". Vol.63, p.172.
- See Wood, Rega. (1997). Ockham on the Virtues. Purdue University Press. pp.3-7.
- Simon, Herbert A. (1962). The Architecture of Complexity Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society Vol.106, p.467-482.
- Sugihara Eri. (2019). "How dare you": Transcript of Greta Thunberg's UN climate speech. Nikkei Asian Review; Nikkei Asian Review.
- The Gettysburg Address: An analysis. (2010). Manner of speaking.
<https://mannerofspeaking.org/2010/11/19/the-gettysburg-address-an-analysis/>